

OUTDOORS

With BRUCE WHITMAN



PROGRESS IS ABOUT to catch up with an all but forgotten section of northern Dauphin County.

Within the next decade — providing preliminary tests and research prove favorable — Stony Creek Valley will become the home of a \$100 million pumped storage hydroelectric project.

The Pennsylvania Power and Light Company project will be located smack in the middle of State Game Lands 211, a 31.30 acre tract of some of the most remote mountain and valley country to be found in the eastern half of Pennsylvania.

Since the days following World War II when the Susquehanna and Schuylkill Railroad, which cut through the valley east to west to haul coal and timber was abandoned, the upper reaches of Stony Creek have been left pretty much to nature.

The only auto access to the area is along the old railroad road bed, a narrow, one lane path which is pretty much a victim of the various whims of nature.

Some years ago the State Game Commission began following a policy of limited access to the Stony Creek area. The policy was two-fold in purpose. Since the road was narrow and in many sections not entirely safe for travel, limited access was as much a public safety measure as anything.

THE BAN ON AUTO TRAVEL also served another purpose. It kept out the road hunter and the casual traveler. Those hardy enough to walk, or bicycle into the area were usually sportsmen with a respect for nature.

A few complained bitterly about the limited auto access policy, but others, mostly sportsmen who were willing to expend a little extra effort in order to get off by themselves for a few hours quiet trout fishing, or hunting, were more than glad to go along with the order.

It's this latter group who will most feel, and maybe resent, the changes that will come to Stony Creek Valley.

If and when PP&L goes through with its multi-million dollar project, Stony Creek will change, in many ways for the better.

In order to construct its pumped hydroelectric project, PP & L is going to have to open new access roads and therefore open much of the remote mountain land to the general public.

It was several months ago that PP&L officials first approached the Game Commission with the desire to obtain rights to some 2,300 acres of State Game Land in the area.

Glenn Bowers, executive director of the Game Commission, admitted to being stunned with the request.

"I asked PP&L to reconsider," said Bowers. "I wanted them to be sure there was no other area suited to their needs. They agreed to this, but after checking came back and said Stony Creek was the best possible site for their project."

BOWERS, LIKE MANY others in Central Pennsylvania, was familiar with the feeling sportsmen have for Stony Creek. The area is not only remote, but rugged and is one of the last strongholds of nature in this part of the state.

The light company's request for land and details of the project were taken before the eight-member Game Commission. The conservation agency board finally granted PP&L permission to make test borings and conduct other research, but not before many lengthy discussions and an actual field trip to the area.

PP&L's basic needs are this: 2,300 acres of land located roughly in the center of the 31,370 acre Game Lands.

In exchange for this land PP&L agrees to provide the Game Commission with other acceptable lands of greater extent and value and further, to return some 700 acres, or roughly one-third of the project lands to a natural condition for public use.

Hydroelectric pumped storage, a relatively new concept to this area, is a simple two-stage operation. During one stage, reversible pump-turbine units pump water from a low-level reservoir to an upper level storage reservoir via connecting underground tunnels. The pumping is done with electricity from fuel-fired steam electric stations when such power facilities are not greatly needed to supply customer needs. The stored water in the upper reservoir, in a sense the equivalent of a giant storage battery, is subsequently returned downhill to the main reservoir through the pump-turbine units which drive the generators to produce electricity during periods of heavy power demand.

THE STONY CREEK PROJECT calls for construction of a lower reservoir, created by damming the stream itself, of some 940 acres. The generating station would be located adjacent to this lower reservoir. The upper storage area would be some 660 acres in size and would be developed by enlarging a hollow between Stony and Sharp Mountains.

Once completed, the project would be capable of generating 1.1 million kilowatts of peak power.

The two reservoirs would have no recreational value because of the repeated and tremendous changes in water level. Because of this factor, trout fishing along the estimated four-mile length of the lower reservoir will be lost.

If research and test borings, scheduled to start full scale next spring, prove the area as suitable for the project as PP&L now believes it to be, construction would begin sometime in the mid-1970's and require some three years to complete.

Before construction on the lower reservoir could start, a diversion channel for Stony Creek would be built to maintain an uninterrupted flow downstream for both water supply and fishing.

ALSO TO BE CONSIDERED is the fact that the project will stabilize the Stony Creek water supply both for fishing and water utilities.

Sportsmen may wonder if lands — purchased with their hunting license dollars and not tax funds — should be exchanged for such a project.

We're living in a time when millions of dollars are being spent to obtain wilderness lands in order that we may escape mushrooming civilization.

However, this project must be viewed realistically. The need is clearly there.

Furthermore, PP&L has agreed to make the project harmonize with its environment. The plant will operate quietly with no smoke, dust, or fumes. It will also be remotely controlled with little or no human activity.

The exchange of a section of Game Lands for other lands is not a new idea. It's been done in other areas and in most cases to the satisfaction of all involved.

Bowers admits that it may be difficult to obtain 2,300 acres suitable for game lands in one chunk in Dauphin County. However, he stressed that the exchange lands would have to be in this general area and of at least equal game land value.

Plans for the project were announced last week at a meeting jointly conducted by PP&L and Game Commission personnel.

At that time, Larry Peters, president of the Hummelstown Field and Stream Assn., asked: "Will sportsmen have any say in the final decision on this project?"

Bowers answered: "We certainly would confer with you (sportsmen) before making a final decision."